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Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development
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Consideration of the Chairman's paper transmitted from the second session of the Commission acting as the preparatory committee, together with relevant inputs to the preparatory process

Letter dated 14 March 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

I have the honour to inform you that the Third High-Level Forum on the Cooperation between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean in the framework of the Interregional Platform of Cooperation was held in Caracas on 19 and 20 February 2002. The Forum adopted the Declaration of Caracas on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (see annex).

The Forum being held some months before the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the heads of State and Government and ministers who attended it mandated its Chairman, H.E. Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to submit the said Declaration to the Summit and its preparatory process for consideration.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Summit and its preparatory process.

(*Signed*) Milos **Alcalay**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 14 March 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

[Original: Spanish]

Third High-Level Forum on the Co-operation between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean in the framework of the Interregional Platform of Co-operation

Declaration of Caracas on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (UNCCD)

We, Heads of State and Government and Ministers, meeting in Caracas, on 19 and 20 February 2002, for the Third High Level Forum on the co-operation between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (UNCCD), at the invitation of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, with the full support of the Secretariat of the UNCCD,

Considering the intrinsic relationship between land degradation and poverty which affects millions of human beings living in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, permanently affecting their livelihood,

Considering that combating poverty is an indispensable condition for the achievement of sustainable development in the framework of equity, progress and social justice,

Considering the persistent trends of desertification worldwide, particularly in fragile ecosystems in developing countries, with the subsequent soil losses which occur annually and lead to irreversible land degradation, and where the capacity to adjust to and overcome these challenges is objectively limited,

Considering that land tenure and ownership are the determining factors for implementation of the Convention, particularly as it relates to the fight against poverty,

Considering that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which came into effect in 1996, is a legally binding instrument derived from the 1992 Earth Summit, to tackle the problem of combating poverty and promoting sustainable development in fragile ecosystems,

Reaffirming the importance to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002, of the resolutions adopted by the Regional Preparatory Conferences of Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Nairobi (Kenya) and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in October 2001, respectively, where the problem of desertification and drought was also discussed,

Recognising the value of the financial and political context of the International Conference on Financing Development, to be held in Monterrey, Mexico, from 18 to 22 March 2002, and the WSSD, to be held in Johannesburg, which are suitable frameworks to strengthen political will and mobilise more financial resources for the implementation of the Convention,

Bearing in mind the Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean Interregional Platform of Co-operation,

Declare that:

1. We reaffirm the guiding principles of the concept of sustainable development as defined in Agenda 21, particularly as it refers to the indivisibility of threats caused by major international imbalances that challenge the very basis and sustainability of developing countries, particularly the poorest among them, which are the most vulnerable.

2. It is necessary to foster an ethic that encourages the building of a multipolar new world order, based on the respect for national sovereignty, on the identity and cultural diversity of peoples, solidarity and promotion of social and economic rights. This order should recognise the value of vital processes and harmony between society and nature as vital elements to achieving sustainable development.

3. Formal and informal environmental education should be considered an essential tool in the strategy of sustainable development.

4. Combating desertification and/or mitigating the effects of drought must be acknowledged and given a preferential and priority status in the international arena, particularly among developed countries.

5. The Convention is a suitable instrument to promote South-South co-operation policies and actions in combating poverty, guaranteeing food security and social development, while ensuring sustainable use of natural resources.

6. We share the deep conviction that South-South co-operation constitutes an effective framework for the implementation of the Convention and strongly believe in its potential to share experiences and put to use the wealth of knowledge they contain. We call upon the financial bilateral and multilateral sources and mechanisms to implement this fundamental concept and provide an appropriate response to the long-term expectations of the South in terms of enhanced global solidarity to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, particularly in countries which are in the front line, severely affected in different regions.

7. We promote policies and strategies that allow the integration of private sector investments to contribute to halting degradation of the environment and natural resources.

8. The financial support and the transfer of appropriate technologies received from the international community are insufficient for a problem of global dimensions that affects nearly one fifth of humanity and exacerbates other major problems of economic, social and environmental importance, putting social and political stability at risk.

9. We reaffirm that desertification and drought must be addressed with substantial financial means, which shall include new and additional financial resources as well as the transfer of appropriate technologies.

10. It is imperative to provide the international community with a predictable multilateral funding mechanism to ensure the timely implementation of the Convention, and we reaffirm the importance of identifying the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as the Convention's primary financial mechanism and call upon the WSSD to invite the GEF Assembly, to be held in Beijing next October, to take a decision accordingly.

11. It is indispensable to conceive sustainable development, in accordance with its three dimensions, namely economic growth, social development and environment protection. Since the Convention constitutes a major instrument that addresses simultaneously those three dimensions, we urge the international community, particularly at the forthcoming G8 Summit, to take place next June in Canada, to give due priority to the implementation of the Convention.

12. Actions must be consolidated to effectively salvage, develop, and apply traditional knowledge and technologies to combat desertification and to mitigate the effects of drought, as well as to develop early warning systems and identify benchmarks and indicators.

13. It is of capital importance to involve civil society in this process, particularly local actors, community-based organisations and territorial collectivities, while taking into full consideration gender balance issues and the spearhead role played by youth in promoting sustainable development at all levels, and we reaffirm the pioneering role of the Convention in emphasising the principle of participatory approach.

14. The Chairman of the Third High-Level Forum on the Co-operation between Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean shall submit this Declaration to the WSSD and its preparatory process for consideration.

Caracas – Venezuela, February 20, 2002